

# Despite Criticisms, Madagascar Moves Ahead with COVID-Organics

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*While Western and Europeans and Asians race to find vaccines for coronavirus, Africa can no longer wait for that scientific discovery that experts have said it would, most probably, be ready in a year or two. Some experts have argued that coronavirus would never disappear, but rather becomes endemic.*

Indeed, the crisis has put the global science to practical test. Every individual country is busy fighting the pandemic in its own way, trying to make sure that it gains from the crisis. As the virus persistently sweeps across the world, southern African island of Madagascar seems desirous with an initiative to tap into its local herbal science to produce COVID-Organics to save human lives.

Madagascar, a southern African island in the Indian Ocean, has found an alternative to fight the fast spreading coronavirus, beginning on experimental basis and with a rudimentary approach at home. With increasing number of coronavirus, Madagascar is steadily depending on its natural resources to help Africa. As a result of the island's isolation, Madagascar is home to various unexploited plants found nowhere else on Earth. Many native plant species are used as herbal remedies for a variety of afflictions.

On April 21, the President of Madagascar **Andry Rajoelina** officially launched a local herbal remedy claimed to prevent and cure the novel coronavirus. The drink is simply called COVID-Organics and is derived from Artemisia - a plant with proven efficacy in malaria treatment.

During an African Union meeting late last month, he stressed the importance of the herbal cure - a variant of which prevents the virus, while another cures it. Speaking to colleague heads of state with a bottle of COVID-Organics on his table, he reiterated the viability of the herbal cure.

*"There are two treatment protocols (curative and preventive). The state of health of COVID-19 patients who took Tambavy CVO CovidOrganics improved after 7 days and fully recovered after 10 days. These patients have taken no other product than COVID-Organics," Rajoelina said.*

In an exclusive interview with FRANCE 24 and RFI, Rajoelina defended his promotion of a controversial homegrown remedy for COVID-19, stressing that COVID-Organics works really well. He further claimed that if a European country had discovered the remedy, people would not be so skeptical.

“What if this remedy had been discovered by a European country, instead of Madagascar? Would people doubt it so much? I don’t think so,” the president told FRANCE 24’s Marc Perelman and RFI’s Christophe Boisbouvier.

“What is the problem with COVID-Organics, really? Could it be that this product comes from Africa? Could it be that it’s not OK for a country like Madagascar, which is the 63rd poorest country in the world... to have come up with (this formula) that can help save the world?” asked Rajoelina, who claims the infusion cures patients within ten days.

“No one will stop us from moving forward – not a country, not an organization,” Rajoelina said in response to the WHO’s concerns, and added the proof of the tonic’s efficacy was in the “healing” of “our patients”, calling it a “preventive and curative remedy,” according to the report.

In a similar argument, **Dr. Charles Andrianjara**, Malagasy Institute of Applied Research (IMRA) Director General pointed out straight “COVID-Organics will be used as prophylaxis that is for prevention, but clinical observations have shown a trend towards its effectiveness in curative treatment.”

In a response to an email media query, an official at the presidency wrote:

“We are committed to taking the traditional therapies through the same clinical trials as other medication. It’s about time to participate and not only observe. As the opportunity emerges, we have the resources to use as a remedy against coronavirus, and to save lives. We need to think how to use it productively and profitably now.”

The global scientific community has become curious. Scientists at Germany’s Max Planck Institute in Potsdam are among a group of researchers from Germany and Denmark collaborating with the United States company, ArtemiLife, to explore whether the Artemisia plant can really be used against the coronavirus. “It is the first study in which scientists are investigating the function of these plant substances in connection with COVID-19,” the Head of the Study Group, Peter Seeberger, said in an interview with DW.



On April 28, while in a video conference with Foreign Ministers from Brazil, China, Russia and

South Africa, the Indian Foreign Affairs Minister, **Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar** noted that the pandemic not only poses a great risk to the health and well-being of humanity but also severely impacts on the global economy.

According to Jaishankar, India is providing pharma assistance to nearly 85 countries, including many countries in Africa, to support their response to the pandemic, and emphasized the need to provide support to businesses, especially small and medium scale enterprises, and the efficacy of traditional medicine systems.

Chinese are highly sensitive to opportunities, leverage indiscriminately to almost all sectors in Africa. Now China is showing interest in adopting and collaborating with Madagascar's herbal initiative. China has already promised to scale up its assistance to Africa by creating a health care initiative that allow African countries to access funds to address challenges in the healthcare delivery. It plans to build the headquarters of the African Center for Disease Control and Prevention.

One area that presents the world with opportunity, and has be explored in the search for treatment is the field of herbal medicine. So far, many countries are adopting supportive care and non-specific treatment options to relieve patient symptoms. Chinese traditional medical practices in China and herbal preparation from Madagascar raise hopes for COVID-19. The potential here gives credence for consideration as traditional and herbal remedy for COVID- 19, argued **Justice Ray Prah** from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST).

Madagascar's scientific initiative has drawn wide criticisms, instead of encouragement and support. The World Health Organization (WHO), established to monitor and tackle global health problems, research for innovative ways to ensure health of people, was rather the first to punch Madagascar. It warns on its website that there is "no evidence to suggest that COVID-19 can be prevented or treated with products made from Artemisia-based plant material." The officials explained that the local African brew safety and effectiveness have not been assessed internationally, nor has any data from trials been published in peer-reviewed studies. Mainstream scientists have warned of the potential risk from consumption of untested herbal brews.

The African Union (AU), Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have also made similar claims and said they would only support and endorse products that proved effective through scientific study. But, the African Union, all African Governments and Regional Organizations have to get committed to taking "traditional therapies" through the same clinical trials as any other medication. It is worth to say that it is necessary to make collective or continental efforts toward finding a remedy against coronavirus.

African leaders have to understand that an effective COVID-19 vaccine, if it ever arrives, has to be treated as a public good for the whole of the global society, but at a cost not as a humanitarian aid. Acknowledging that profit-motivated global monopolies and market speculators in the health sector will nevertheless use the chance to their advantage. The combination of national self-interest and pressure for the pharmaceutical industry to make a profit is already triggering a geopolitical bust up over who actually gets access to the vaccine first.

Several media reports said an increasing number of African countries are opting for the

COVID-Organics. About 10 African leaders have, already ordered for it since its launch in April. The countries include Chad, Comoros Islands, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Togo and United Republic of Tanzania.

With COVID-19, Africa has to explore its own resources. African countries and the African Union (AU) have to reinforce scientific cooperation among its member states so that the continent can be ready for quick and concerted efforts to deal with unexpected health crises such as coronavirus, recently argued **Dr Aminata Touré**, former Prime Minister of Senegal and currently President of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council in Dakar, Senegal.

It is certainly too soon to draw some lessons on the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic since it continues to dramatically affect significant segments of the world population and still remains a puzzle, an enigma for the world scientific community. Some African governments, at different levels, have mobilized their resources and expertise, elaborated innovative strategies and carried out bold and strategies to contain the spread of the coronavirus, she explained.

“The African Union has to reinforce the scientific cooperation among its member states in order to ensure our common health sovereignty. This is urgent today, to put in place a genuine scientific partnership between our African universities so that we can identify anticipatory and preventive therapeutic and pharmaceutical solutions to human suffering. We must actively encourage the African scientific diaspora to build solid cooperation, exchange network systems with our counterparts from the continent in order to build African centers of research and laboratory excellence,” suggested Touré.

Touré explicitly concluded that only these would be capable of helping to inspire widely recognized African initiatives on the cutting edge of research and development for medicinal and vaccine cures. This is the true path to health sovereignty.

Nearly a quarter of a billion people across Africa will catch coronavirus during the first year of the pandemic, the World Health Organization has said in a new study published in the British Medical Journal. The study further warns that 190,000 Africans could die of COVID-19 in the first 12 months of the pandemic unless urgent action is taken.

According to the latest figures from the WHO, Africa has more than 60,000 cases of COVID-19, which implies that Africa has been spared the worst of the pandemic. Experts say that the low number of tests in Africa is certainly hiding the true scale of the crisis. The African countries most affected by the pandemic included South Africa and Maghreb countries of Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco. Ghana and Nigeria have disturbing infected numbers in West Africa.

Thirty-five (35) African countries have each recorded less than a thousand cases. Eritrea is among a handful of African countries that have not recorded deaths as of May 15, others are Madagascar, Central Africa Republic, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, Lesotho, Rwanda and Uganda. Mauritius declared total recoveries (332) from coronavirus infections (332) as of May 11.

Madagascar reported no deaths. Out 238 cases, it claimed 126 active and 112 have

recovered. Madagascar's natural resources include a variety of agricultural and mineral products. Its major health infrastructure, in poor conditions, similar to many African countries. Madagascar, located in southern Africa, has 26.3 million population and belongs to the group of least developed countries, according to the United Nations. It is a member of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and African Union (AU).

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